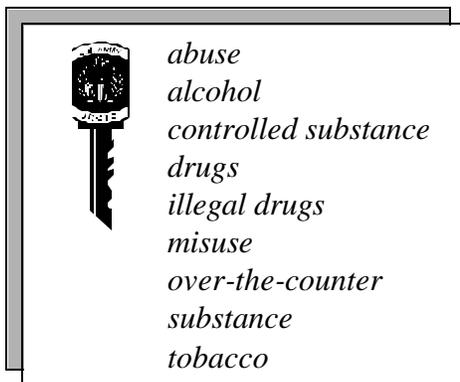


## DRUG AWARENESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

### LESSON 1: COMMONLY ABUSED SUBSTANCES AND THEIR USE



#### INTRODUCTION

Used under proper conditions, **drugs** can relieve pain, cure illness, and save lives. When abused, however, drugs can ruin lives and even cause death. This lesson defines drugs and explains the difference between drug use, drug **misuse**, and drug **abuse**. It discusses several types of drugs that people abuse, their side effects, and indications of overdose.

Think about the word “drug” for a moment. It can bring many images to mind **over-the-counter** aspirin to stop a headache, a news report about someone arrested for cocaine possession, a prescription for antibiotics from your doctor, a drug-related death covered on the front page of the paper, medical research to develop drugs to cure illnesses, the war on drugs, etc. So exactly what is a drug?

Broadly defined, a drug is any **substance** taken into the body that changes how the body functions, whether mentally or physically. This includes medications used for the prevention and treatment of disease, as well as any **controlled substance** to which a

person can become addicted. Whether or not a drug is legal or illegal is no indication of whether or not it is addictive. For example, both **alcohol** and the nicotine in **tobacco** products like cigarettes are addictive drugs. And, just because a drug has a medical purpose does not mean it is not addictive. Many medications, when misused or abused, can cause addiction.

#### DRUG USE, MISUSE, OR ABUSE?

*Drug use* is taking a legal drug as recommended or prescribed for medical reasons. *Drug misuse* is taking a legal drug for medical reasons but not as recommended or prescribed. For example, a person who doubles the recommended dosage of a pain reliever because they think it will make their headache go away quicker is misusing a drug. *Drug abuse* is taking a legal or **illegal drug** for a nonmedical reason in a way that can injure your health or ability to function.

#### WHY DO PEOPLE ABUSE DRUGS?

Some people try drugs out of curiosity or as an act of rebellion. Others cannot resist the peer pressure to try drugs. Once people have tried a drug, whether or not they continue to abuse it depends on their individual personalities and situations and on the kind of drug abused.

Most drugs that people abuse produce feelings of pleasure and well-being. When people are unhappy, lonely, or stressed, or are missing something in their lives such as friends, love, or satisfying work, they may abuse drugs to avoid their problems or fill a void. But when the effects of the drug wear off, they realize the problems and the void are still there. So, they turn to the drug again.

This cycle is what leads to addiction, a trap that can ruin a person emotionally, socially, economically, legally, and physically. Some drugs are far more addictive than others. For example, a first-time user of crack cocaine has a one in three chance of becoming an addict. This is why it is important to stop before you ever start taking drugs.



**STOP!**

#### *WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REMAIN DRUG-FREE?*

- ⇒ Fill your life with activities and people you enjoy.
- ⇒ Believe in yourself.
- ⇒ Practice saying no before you are actually in a situation where someone offers you drugs, so you will not hesitate to say no when the time comes.
- ⇒ Think through the consequences of abusing drugs. Where will drugs lead you in life? How long will your body remain

healthy if you abuse drugs? How many of your plans can drugs ruin?

- ⇒ Remember that drugs do not solve problems; they create them.

### **COMMONLY ABUSED DRUGS AND THEIR EFFECTS**

Many people take drugs without knowing what effect they have on the mind and body. Knowing ahead of time what a drug can do is often enough to convince a person not to try it, especially if one of the potential dangers of abusing a drug is death.

#### *ALCOHOL*

Alcohol, legal for those 21 years of age and older, is the most widely consumed and abused drug in the United States. It is socially acceptable in our society for adults to drink in moderation. In excess, however, alcohol is a dangerous drug.

In moderation, alcohol causes people to relax and produces a sense of euphoria. But the more a person drinks, the more his or her brain is affected by the depressant quality of alcohol. This does not mean that the person feels depressed, but that parts of the brain that control behavior are depressed or “put to sleep.” Speech slurs, vision blurs, and judgment and coordination are impaired.

With enough alcohol in the body, the person’s conscious brain becomes entirely depressed, causing the person to lose consciousness. Extremely high levels of alcohol in the body can cause death when the part of the brain that controls breathing and heartbeat is depressed. In most cases, however, before a drinker reaches these extreme states of drunkenness, the body causes him or her to vomit, getting rid of alcohol in the stomach before more is absorbed into the bloodstream. This is

one way the body defends itself against alcohol, which is a poison.

Since the liver filters poisons out of the bloodstream, it is the first organ damaged by long-term alcohol abuse. This leads to high blood pressure; a weakened immune system; and excess fat in the blood vessels and fat storage sites, such as the stomach, hips, and legs. Other health problems caused by excessive alcohol abuse include ulcers, kidney and bladder damage, brain damage affecting vision and memory, and an increased risk of cancer.

In addition to the health risks of long-term alcohol abuse are injuries and deaths from alcohol-related accidents and violence. Since alcohol affects judgment, people who have had too much to drink may try dangerous stunts, including driving “under the influence.” Driving drunk is illegal, because alcohol affects vision and coordination and slows reaction time, making a drunk driver a very dangerous individual. Every year, thousands of young people die and tens of thousands are disfigured and crippled in alcohol-related car accidents.

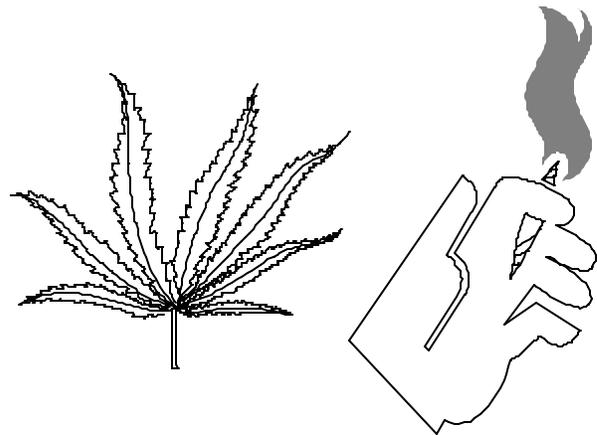
**DON'T DRINK  
& DRIVE**



With their judgment affected by too much alcohol, people may also become aggressive. Alcohol is a factor in over 50 percent of murders and child abuse cases, and over 25 percent of rapes and suicides.

### *MARIJUANA (Pot, Grass, Weed, Dope, Reefer)*

Marijuana comes from the plant cannabis, also called hemp, which is harvested and dried, and then smoked in cigarettes (joints) or pipes. The active chemicals in marijuana affect the brain, altering hearing, taste, touch, smell, and sense of time and space. The effects of marijuana vary from person to person depending on each person's expectations and how much they smoke, and because the chemicals in different marijuana plants vary. People may experience anything from a mild euphoria to uncontrollable laughter to hallucinations.

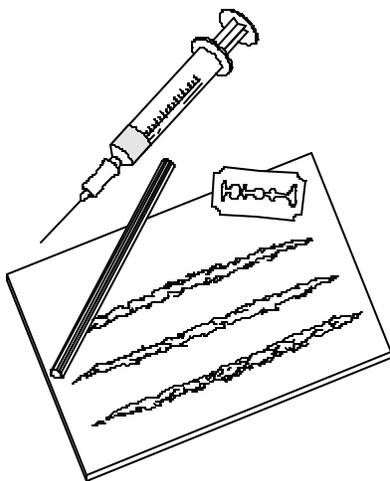


Harmful health effects of marijuana use may include rapid and irregular heartbeat, short-term memory loss, shortened attention span, a weakened immune system, fatigue, and a higher risk of lung cancer. In extreme cases, marijuana abuse can result in paranoia and psychosis. Like alcohol, marijuana abuse can affect driving ability. As with any illegal drug, marijuana is not tested for safety and purity. It may contain pesticides and molds and may be mixed with other dangerous drugs.

*COCAINE (Coke, Crack, Flake, Rock, Snow)*

Cocaine is an illegal drug that comes from the leaves of the coca bush. It is a white powder that one snorts into the nose or mixes with water and injects. It is a stimulant that affects the nervous system providing short bursts of euphoria, a feeling of excitement, increased blood pressure and pulse rate, and alertness. People often use it to increase mental activity and to offset drowsiness and fatigue. However, the intense high of cocaine is followed by an intense low. Repeated abuse of cocaine can result in a strong physical and psychological dependency. The body will ignore all other drives, including hunger, in its drive for cocaine.

Crack is cocaine in a smokable form. With crack, the user feels the high immediately, but the euphoria fades quickly. It is an extremely addictive drug.



Cocaine abuse causes headaches, chronic fatigue, and destruction of nasal tissue. Pregnant women who abuse cocaine can have infants with birth defects. Cocaine addicts often lose their ability to work and have relationships. Signs of an overdose of cocaine include hallucinations, convulsions, nervousness, and high body temperature. An

overdose of cocaine may result in kidney failure and death.

*AMPHETAMINES (Speed)*

Like cocaine, amphetamines are stimulants. They stimulate the nervous system, increasing physical activity, energy, mental alertness, and self-confidence, and producing euphoria. Medically, amphetamines are used to treat obesity, narcolepsy, and hyperactivity in children. For example, the amphetamine Ritalin is used to stimulate the brain center that helps hyperactive children sit still and pay attention.

As a drug of abuse, amphetamines are often referred to as “speed.” Many people abuse amphetamines to increase energy and alertness, and in some cases to combat fatigue brought on by use of alcohol, marijuana, or depressants. However, the body builds up tolerance to amphetamines, and greater and greater doses are required to achieve the same effects. Addiction may become severe.

Medically, amphetamines are taken orally, but many abusers inject the drug directly into a vein increasing the risk of overdose and infection. Needles shared to inject the drug can spread hepatitis and HIV. After an injection of amphetamines, the user experiences intense, short-lived euphoria. An addict may inject the drug several times a day for several days feeling little need for food or sleep. Mental depression and overwhelming fatigue follow abuse, which may cause the abuser to turn to amphetamines again for relief.

In addition to fatigue and depression, other side effects of amphetamine abuse include extreme anxiety, temporary mental illness, and malnutrition. High doses can cause hallucinations, increased body temperature, high blood pressure, convulsions,

kidney failure, lack of oxygen, bleeding of the brain, and death. Withdrawal symptoms include irritability, depression, disorientation, long periods of sleep, and not caring about anything.

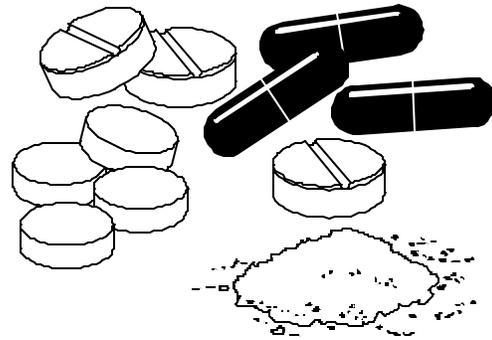
### *METHAMPHETAMINE (Crank, Meth, Ice)*

Methamphetamine is a nervous system stimulant like amphetamines that is used medically in much the same way as amphetamines. This drug is abused to produce heightened awareness, alertness, and self-confidence. A smokable form of methamphetamine is “ice.” Like crack, it produces an intense high without the use of needles and is extremely addictive. Abuse of methamphetamine may result in bizarre behavior, sleeplessness, depression, high blood pressure, increased body temperature, convulsions, heart problems, seizures, and strokes.

Methcathinone, also called “cat” and “star,” is a designer drug similar to methamphetamine that can cause paranoia, slurred speech, tremors, extreme weight loss, and sleeplessness

### *BARBITURATES*

Barbiturates are a group of depressant drugs that include phenobarbital (goofballs), pentobarbital (yellow jackets), amobarbital (blue devils), and secobarbital (red devils). They lower body temperature and blood pressure, slow breathing and heart rate, and as such, have many medical uses. For example, doctors prescribe phenobarbital to reduce the frequency of convulsions in epileptics. Unfortunately, people frequently abuse barbiturates, sometimes causing physical and psychological dependency.



Signs of barbiturate abuse include fatigue, blurred vision, confused or slurred speech, lack of coordination and balance, a reduction of mental and physical activity, and decreased breathing. Abusers will often act like they are drunk, but there will be no smell of alcohol. Long-term abuse may result in double vision, depression, and forgetfulness.

Signs of an overdose of barbiturates include dilated pupils, a rapid pulse, shallow breathing, and clammy skin. An overdose can cause coma and death. Since barbiturates cause confusion and forgetfulness, accidental death occurs when a person has taken barbiturates, becomes confused, forgets, and takes more barbiturates. Accidental poisoning occurs when barbiturates are combined with alcohol. Withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, insomnia, tremors, delirium, and convulsions.

### *HEROIN (Antifreeze, Smack, Horse, Harry, Junk)*

Heroin is a narcotic. Doctors prescribe narcotics to relieve pain and coughs and to cause sleepiness. Heroin, however, is so addictive that it is not used as a medicine and is illegal. Once injected, sniffed, or smoked, it dulls the senses and produces a feeling of euphoria. Other effects include drowsiness and nausea.

Signs of an overdose include shallow and slow breathing, clammy skin, and convul-

sions. An overdose can result in a coma and death. Once addicted, a person must have more of the drug to keep from experiencing withdrawal symptoms, which are severe and can include panic, shaking, chills, sweating, cramps, and nausea.

### *LSD (Acid)*

LSD is a very powerful hallucinogen that scrambles and confuses the senses. A tiny drop taken with sugar or food can cause a person to “trip” or experience false visions, smells, and sounds for hours. Some people say these experiences are exciting; others say they are nightmares. Those having a “bad trip” may take dangerous or irrational actions to escape from this imaginary situation. In addition to these affects, LSD can cause nausea, vomiting, and misinterpretations of time and distance. Some people experience flashbacks of LSD’s effects days, weeks, and years after the original trip. An overdose of LSD can result in psychosis, accidental death, and suicide.

### *PCP (Angel Dust)*

PCP, used as a tranquilizer for animals, can cause frightening hallucinations when used by humans. Abuse can result in seizures, coma, and death or in violent, unpredictable behavior. Some abusers have committed murder and suicide.

### *PSILOCYBIN (Mushrooms, Shrooms)*

### *MESCALINE (Mesc, Buttons, Cactus)*

Two other hallucinogens are psilocybin, produced from a type of mushroom, and mescaline, produced from a type of cactus. Like other hallucinogens, use of these drugs can cause hallucinations, perception problems, nausea, vomiting, and, in extreme cases, mental illness, suicide, or accidental death. Mescaline effects, while compared to a mild

LSD trip, are often accompanied by sweating and severe abdominal cramps. Eating mushrooms poses another danger since many mushrooms look alike and some are poisonous enough to cause death.

### *INHALANTS (Air Blast)*

Inhalants are toxic chemicals like glue, freon, nail polish, spray paint, and gasoline that are huffed (sprayed into a cloth and held over the mouth and nose) or bagged (sniffed from a bag, bottle, or can) to achieve a brief, mild euphoria. All of these products contain labels warning against inhaling their fumes because of the hazards involved. Some inhalants used medically are also abused like amyl nitrate which relieves heart pain and nitrous oxide which relieves anxiety.

Risks involved with inhaling these chemicals include nausea; dizziness; vomiting; headaches; unconsciousness; pneumonia; permanent brain and nerve damage; bleeding of the brain; eventual liver, brain, and kidney cancer; and death due to heart failure and suffocation. Effects of inhalants are very unpredictable and depend on what chemical or chemicals are inhaled and how much. Brain damage and death may result after only one use depending on the inhalants involved.

### *ECSTASY (XTC, Love Drug)*

Ecstasy is a designer drug that closely resembles cocaine. It produces euphoria that lasts several hours, heightens pleasure, and may even produce hallucinations in high doses. Ecstasy is taken orally and may cause mood swings, overly friendly behavior, insomnia, anxiety, and nausea. In extreme cases, abuse may result in seizure and death.

***ROHYPNOL (Roofies, Forget Pill, Date-Rape Pill)***

Rohypnol is used legally as a medical sedative in Europe and Latin America. As a drug of abuse, it is called roofies, forget pill, and date-rape pill. At first, it produces an alcoholic type of high, then heavy sedation and short-term memory loss that lasts up to eight hours. It earned its reputation as the date-rape pill by being slipped into the drinks of females, who were taken advantage of in a state of sedation brought on by the drug and then unable to remember exactly what happened to them. In addition to the drawback just discussed, dangers of abusing rohypnol include impaired motor skills and slow respiration.

**CONCLUSION**

When drugs are properly used, they can cure illness and save lives. When abused, however, drugs can destroy lives and cause death. It is important to understand that, while people often abuse drugs to find happiness and fulfillment, drugs only create more problems and unhappiness. To keep from falling into the trap of drug abuse, stay smart, strong, and active. Say “no.” Recognize the different drugs that are abused in our society and what affect they have on people’s health and lives. Know what steps to take if you believe someone has overdosed or has consumed a dangerous amount of alcohol. You can set an example of an informed, drug-free individual.